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The Winds of Change: Turkey's Evolution Toward Authoritarianism

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Abstract

The results of the 7 June 2015 Government of Turkey (GoT) Parliamentary elections will affirm the shift of Turkish politics away from Western democracy for the foreseeable future. Instability in the region has elevated Turkey's strategic value, and the most recent example of that is the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria that has increased the strategic and tactical value of Turkey. The newly enacted Syrian Train and Equip program is a significant aspect of the US-Turkish relationship and underscores the strengths of each partner: Turkish geopolitical value and regional leadership as well as US military, financial, and international coordination. President Erdoğan wants to increase and consolidate power as he shifts Turkey from a Parliamentary system to a Presidential government. Repression of dissenting or oppositional voices is a disturbing aspect of Turkey's trajectory. A stable, democratic, free, and modern Turkey is beneficial to the US, Turkey, the Middle East, and beyond. As Erdoğan guides his country toward a more conservative path, the US must understand Turkey's importance, concerns, desires, and trajectory in order to assist Turkey to remain a moderate, stable, mutually supportive and effective ally.

The Future of Turkey:

The results of the 7 June 2015 Government of Turkey (GoT) Parliamentary elections will affirm the shift of Turkish politics away from Western democracy for the foreseeable future. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the most dynamic and accomplished Turkish politician since Kemal Atatürk founded the country in 1923, has steadily moved his nation in a direction that is unsettling to many in the international community. Since 2003, Erdoğan leveraged a combination of advanced political skill; domestic economic success partially predicated on good fortune and an ability to maintain stability in an unstable region to gain unprecedented popularity and is now largely responsible for the present and future direction of the GoT. He has masterfully orchestrated the advancement of Turkish interests and national identity. Erdoğan has fostered an innate Turkish pride and juxtaposed that against an induced paranoia and a sense of external oppression. He has enjoyed overwhelming public support by leading Turkey during unprecedented economic and domestic service improvements throughout his 12 years as Turkish Prime Minister and as the leader of the political party he co-founded, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Erdoğan, as the country's first directly elected head of state as of August 2014, has parleyed his popularity and the previous success of the AKP into an ability to change the political landscape to consolidate Presidential power through legislation and appointments. As Erdoğan guides his country toward a more conservative path, the US must understand Turkey's importance, concerns, desires, and trajectory in order to assist Turkey to remain a moderate, stable, mutually supportive and effective ally.

Political Leaders of Turkey:

As Prime Minister and leader of the AKP, Erdoğan both facilitated and retarded Turkish advancement. His party created jobs, increased trade, provided housing, improved telecom

services, roads, sanitation, health care and education. While leading Turkey to an improved domestic standard of living in those respects, he has also curtailed domestic freedoms. The AKP has impeded social progress, restricted freedom of expression, and mingled politics with the judiciary, military, and police. He has been very effective and has expressed that he can continue or expand that effectiveness if Turkey institutes a Presidentially-focused Executive Branch instead of the Parliamentary system that he led as Prime Minister.

Although Erdoğan is the most influential person within the GoT, other personalities can affect its evolution. It is important to note that although Erdoğan displayed a tendency to favor curtailment of free expression and human rights when he was Prime Minister, he did not do so unopposed within the government. Former President Gul, whom Erdoğan replaced in August 2014, occasionally slowed or softened Erdoğan's tendencies. For example, as recently as February 2014, then President Gul returned a bill championed by then Prime Minister Erdoğan designed to restrict free speech and internet use. This action ultimately enabled the removal of the more rigid aspects of the bill. Former Foreign Minister and current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is also an influential member of the GoT who has demonstrated a slightly different agenda with substantially different methods to achieve it. Also, in a particularly Turkish twist, Fethullah Gülen, a former ally and now fierce critic of Erdoğan, is a current and enduring influence. The AKP accused Gülen of creating a 'parallel state' in an attempt to overthrow Erdoğan's government. Although he has fallen sharply from the inner circle to an enemy of the state, he has millions of international followers and still affects Turkish politics from his self-imposed exile in the US.

Why Turkey is Important Today:

Historically, Turkey is known as the crossroads of the world. Its geographic importance is difficult to overstate. For millennia, Turkey has either been part of or a neighbor to the dominant culture of the world. Its location ensured its relevance to those who wished to transit or trade between the East and the West. For that reason, the Republic of Turkey is a land of dichotomies. It is both Western and Middle Eastern. It is modern and traditional. It is subsistent and affluent. It depends upon others for energy but leverages the demands from others for transport. It has a rich history and is less than a century old. This duality is an integral component of Turkey's geopolitical history and "is among its key original qualifications."¹ Turkey maintains a significant level of importance today for similar reasons, although one can argue that the increase in global interconnectivity has added to its strategic value.

Although Turkey struggled to remain a global player as the Ottoman Empire descended and ultimately dissolved in 1923, it maintained its regional influence. Turkey chose to maintain close ties with the US and many European countries. Turkey-US relations were primarily positive and the two nations established a pattern of partnership. In 2003, the AKP became the ruling party in Turkey and brought with it a slow and steady adoption of what many consider a neo-Ottoman agenda. Instability in the region has elevated Turkey's strategic value, and the most recent example of that is the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that has increased the strategic and tactical value of Turkey. Turkey had remained either neutral or ineffective in any international resistance to ISIS, but on 19 February 2015, the US and Turkey agreed to provide training and equipment (T&E) to Syrian opposition forces.

Turkey is a NATO member and has recently taken a lead role in multi-lateral support to stabilizing the region, which is currently experiencing significant turbulence in neighboring Iraq

and Syria as well as nearby Libya, Ukraine, and Egypt. Simultaneously with this role of solidarity with Western nations, Turkey has moved away from the principles of freedom and democracy that those nations value.

The dynamic nature of global politics demands that the US maintain an awareness of Turkey's desires and capabilities. The geostrategic importance of Turkey has not diminished with the global connectedness that accompanied the information age. Although China has claimed an increasing role in global trade as well as political and military importance, Turkey is still central to trade, lines of communication, and political alliances, especially with respect to Islamic, Arab, or Middle Eastern concerns. Turkey clearly desires to play a significant and leading role in the evolving global balance in its region.

Understanding the current US-Turkey relationship is important in order to properly plan interactions and protect mutual interests. It is also important to understand what has affected US-Turkey relations in order to ensure a reduction or elimination of negative impacts in the future. This will enable the US to interact with Turkey in a more efficient manner while engendering Turkish assistance in defeating ISIS and in support of US interests. Over the past decade, Turkey has steadily improved its domestic economic power as well as its regional influence. As important as economics are, however, the financial picture is only one aspect of Turkey's interests. It is important to understand additional international concerns that the GoT values.

Turkey's Myriad International Concerns:

Turkey adopts varying international stances with each of its neighbors as well as other major powers and is motivated to maintain a friendly relationship with almost all of them. Turkey has fostered and enjoyed a positive, friendly, and mutually beneficial relationship with

the US for the majority of the time since its creation in 1923. Turkey was a prominent supporter of the US in the First Gulf War in the early 1990s despite opposition from its Middle East neighbors. Not all interactions have been positive, however. A source of tension between the two, Turkey does hold some resentment related to the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI by Western powers, primarily the UK and France. The current GoT has referenced this old wound when emphasizing the need for Turkey to be self-sufficient.

The largest single event to shape US-Turkey relations was the 1 March 2003 vote in which the Turkish Parliament, led by newly formed AKP and the newly elected Prime Minister Erdoğan, chose to not allow US troops to invade Iraq from Turkish bases.² Scholars and foreign relations experts attribute this to many reasons: the inexperience of a new leading party in Parliament, the incoherence of desire within that party, a domestic agenda that included active opposition to the Kurdish people within Turkey and northern Iraq, financial concerns about a war along their border, and an overwhelmingly negative public opinion of the impending war.^{3, 4}

Masaki Kakizaki, author of *Anti-War Protests in Turkey: Global Networks, Coalitions, and Context*, analyzed newspaper reports of Turkish anti-war protests in conjunction with the March 2003 vote in order to discover how popular participation from numerically marginal and non-robust institutions could have affected Turkish international politics. He noted a significant spike in Turkish anti-war protests just prior to the vote.⁵ This context may help explain the incoherent message put forth by the newly elected AKP who were attempting to appease domestic public opinion while maintaining positive international relations with the US.

The latest regional turmoil in which the US and Turkey have mutual interest is the civil war in Syria and the fight against ISIS. The newly enacted T&E program designed to assist moderate Syrian opposition fighters is a significant part of the US-Turkish relationship and

underscores the strengths of each partner: Turkish geopolitical value and regional leadership as well as US military, financial, and international coordination. It also is a good comparative point between the levels of support and alliance in 2003 and that of 2015. The T&E program holds a great deal of promise to galvanize the region and provide significant benefit to the fight for stability and against ISIS, but it also has the potential to highlight the difficulties of international mobilization and cooperation. Unfortunately, early indications suggest that the program is behind schedule and lacks clarity on tactical issues such as vetting, rules of engagement, and search and rescue responsibilities. The existence of this program is a key indicator of the positive US-Turkey relationship.

Although fully into a decline by the start of World War I, the Ottoman Empire chose the losing side of that war, after which Western powers dismantled it in 1923 and reduced its once-vast borders to those of modern day Turkey. The non-homogeneity born of various cultures and ethnicities encapsulated by the arguably arbitrary boundaries established in 1923 gave rise to instability and a significant topic of concern for the Turkish government: the Kurdish population that exists throughout Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Barak Salmoni cites this as a reason that Turkey did not approve the 1 March 2003 vote in his article *Strategic Partners or Estranged Allies*. Salmoni noted that the Turkish government was concerned that the US would use the military operations in Iraq to empower the Kurds and then move forward with power politics with a newly formed Kurdish state.⁶ The Turkish government clearly saw Kurdish empowerment as a threat, but the US did not view it as such. The fear that a war would strengthen the support for an independent Kurdish state was so powerful that it overrode any Turkish desire to assist the US during the 1 March 2003 vote. A related Turkish concern was the

potential for a large-scale refugee influx, and the possible negative effects on regional stability as perceived by Turkey resulting from the First Gulf War.⁷

Turkey's immediate international concern is with the instability and violence within two bordering countries: Iraq and Syria. However, Turkey also shares a border with Iran and its concern for diplomatic relations with its Islamic neighbor tempers its desire to act unilaterally. As recently as April 2015, the GoT has said that both Iran and Turkey should adopt a mediator role in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria while claiming that Turkey and Iran are likely to disagree over Tehran's efforts to expand its regional influence via Syria.

Another important issue for Turkey concerns Armenia and international opinion of events at the end of WWI. In 1915, as many as two million Armenians died during a forced relocation from Turkey to Armenia. Each year in April, this issue heightens tensions in the region and with some international partners. As the 100-year anniversary of these events occurred in 2015, tensions were particularly high in Turkey and visible on the global stage. Specifically, public pressure on Turkey by the EU and Pope Francis to admit that the atrocities committed upon Armenians at the end of World War I amounted to genocide accentuated a rift that developed over Turkey's pending application for accession into the EU. Turkey originally applied for accession in 1987 to the predecessor organization, the European Economic Community. The GoT has used this perceived slight to rally domestic support.

As an example of astute politics, President Erdoğan adjusted his stance on the issue based upon his perception of the message the Turkish people desire. Early in 2015, he expressed a conciliatory tone by offering condolences to descendants of Armenian victims. By April 2015, he described Turkey as an injured victim of international disparagement. He noted that "it is out of the question for there to be a stain or a shadow called genocide on Turkey." As another

example of Turkish laws that inhibit freedoms, assertions that “insult Turkish identity” such as describing the Armenian atrocities as ‘genocide’ are criminal acts.⁸

An ongoing dispute and resulting division of Cyprus as well as tensions over the sovereignty of the Aegean Sea separating Greece and Turkey is at the center of a strained relationship between the neighboring countries. Greek authorities report hundreds of annual Turkish incursions by naval and air forces over the past two decades. The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in Europe increased international tensions because resource limitations have made acquisition of fuel for the Greek military much more difficult and therefore put them in a more vulnerable position relative to the Turks.

Turkey’s choices affect US strategic interests. A stable, democratic, free, and modern Turkey is beneficial to the US, Turkey, the Middle East, and beyond. Because Turkey is a regionally influential nation, any Turkish shift to a more authoritarian governmental system by reducing transparency and checks and balances and by reducing of civil liberties could legitimize other less free regimes or encourage other nations to do the same. Moreover, if it does so, it would become even more likely to fall under the influence of Russia and become an opponent to US interests. A NATO member that is dependent on Russian energy and that subscribes to Russian international politics will cause considerable strain at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and North Africa. That is why it is important to understand what Turkey desires and for the US to apply that knowledge to take an active role to maintain a positive and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship.

What Does Turkey Want?

Turkey possesses a large range of national desires, some of which are at times in opposition to one another. As is true of most nations, the GoT wants to be a regional leader and

wants other nations to treat it as an important part of the international community. It wants all of its neighbors to view it favorably, but it has a particular desire for Muslim nations to view it as a good ally. As it continues to ascend in regional power, Turkey's desire to demonstrate its independence from the US, EU, and NATO has begun to eclipse its desire to earn approval as a cooperative part of those relationships. Finally, the GoT has continually shown that it understands the value of a strong economy because it can translate that into continued domestic power, so it places financial health as one of its top priorities.

Michael Rubin's *A Comedy of Errors: American-Turkish Diplomacy and the Iraq War*, provides an example of Turkey's desire for treatment as an important regional and international partner. Prior to the 2003 Iraq war, the US State Department failed to react to the changing context of Turkish political power. Secretary of State Colin Powell not traveling to Turkey even once during the critical timeframe of late 2002 to early 2003 underscored an abysmal representation of high-level diplomacy. The Turkish Grand National Assembly, an influential parliamentary body, was a decisive factor in the 1 March 2003 Parliamentary vote and "showed its influence over Turkish foreign policy making for the first time since the 1970s."⁹ While the US failed to demonstrate its understanding of the importance of Turkey, the GoT also overestimated its importance to the US. Sharon Otterman, author of *Iraq: US-Turkey Relations*, assessed that the Turkish government fell victim to an overestimation of their importance to US plans and attempted to use their non-compliance or slow actions to avert the 2003 war. Political actions are often taken without knowing the outcome, and politicians and advisors make incorrect predictions. As Otterman pointed out, this was the case in the 2003 when the GoT misinterpreted US President Bush's political plan and attempted to delay the war.

Turkey's desire for treatment as a significant power and demonstration by the international community of appropriate importance occasionally manifests itself as paranoia of external conspiracies or the adoption of a victim mentality. The GoT often portrays itself as the oppressed or the victim and this is evident with respect to the Turkish application to the EU. Statements by the GoT or through pro-government news agencies express multiple conspiracy theories. Turkey claims that conspiratorial forces continually delay its accession to the EU. An official statement by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated "The European Parliament known for contriving obstacles to the development of Turkey-EU relations aspired once again to rewrite history regarding the 1915 [Armenian] events, as it has attempted to do so previously. This aspiration resulted in a preposterous text of resolution dated 15 April 2015 which literally repeats the anti-Turkish clichés of the Armenian propaganda."¹⁰ Turkish headlines present further examples regarding the 'parallel structure' or the 'superior mind' theories. Local news services quote intelligence reports that claim that the CIA established and supported Gülen and his organization along with the Mooni sect and the organization Opus Dei.

Another major concern for Turkey is its perceived and actual status as an ally of neighboring Muslim countries. In her article *The Turkish-American Crisis: An Analysis of 1 March 2003*, Karen Kaya noted that prior to the 2003 Iraq War vote, Turkey's concerns about assisting in a fight against its Muslim neighbors played a significant role in the decision to not support an invasion from Turkey.¹¹ While the US viewed the planned operations in 2003 as lawful and morally correct, the "US administration was criticized for pursuing a selfish and imperialist policy towards Iraq in particular and the Islamic world in general."¹² Soner Cagaptay and Mark Parris note that while the US viewed the planned military action through the lens of stabilization and preservation of global interests, the Turkish population and many of its

ministers interpreted the planned US actions as conspiratorial or too similar to the imperialistic manners of the European powers.¹³

The GoT has recently increased its concern with defense independence as it de-emphasized EU accession aspirations. As Prime Minister beginning in 2003, Erdoğan sought and attained close ties with Western countries as Turkey bid to join the EU. However, EU accession progress stalled as Western countries expressed concerns about increasing autocracy and decreasing human rights in Turkey. Consequently, Erdoğan has repeatedly accused the West of actively hampering Turkey's progress. In March 2015, Turkey's PM Davutoğlu stated his belief that the Ottoman Empire lost WWI because they were dependent upon others for combat techniques. As a result, the GoT has attempted to reduce its military dependence upon Western nations. It has recently begun rocket testing and development of indigenous radar technology facilities. These are intended to supplement its arms industry that provides ground and naval force equipment and has targeted a Turkish built jet fighter by 2023. Additionally, Turkey has continued to consider the China Precision Machinery Import & Export Corporation for its \$3.4 billion USD part of the NATO missile defense program even though it that has been sanctioned by the US multiple times for nonproliferation act violations. NATO has also conveyed the incompatibility and intelligence concerns of using the Chinese firm.

The AKP has benefitted from a strong economy for the majority of the past decade and placed emphasis upon continuing that trend. Following a period of significant economic prosperity and growth that translated to strong domestic approval of the GoT from a happy and supportive public, Turkey's economy slowed down after 2008. From 2003 to 2007, the AKP was able to guide Turkey to an average of seven percent growth rate.¹⁴ Coincident with the financial crises in the US and that which followed in the EU, the AKP was only able to guide

Turkey to a three percent growth rate from 2008-2014. With the notable exception of 2010, Turkey's GDP has increased each year from \$483 billion USD in 2006 to \$820 billion USD in 2014.¹⁵ Amid the declining economic numbers, Prime Minister Davutoğlu delivered a 'roadmap' in April 2015 that included a goal of more than doubling Turkey's per capita income to \$25,000 USD by 2023.

The leading Turkish politicians are guiding Turkey simultaneously toward two distinct futures. President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu desire to bring Turkey into a more prominent role in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Caucuses, but each demonstrates a desire to follow a different path. Erdoğan acts to consolidate power and reduce freedoms while Davutoğlu describes a more liberal future of the GoT that incorporates more freedoms and an expanded democracy built upon transparency and international legitimacy.

Now that Erdoğan is the President, he wants to increase and consolidate power as he shifts Turkey from a Parliamentary system to a Presidential government. As one would expect of a country in a region containing many sources of instability, the issue of national security assumes an elevated level of importance. In addition, as one would expect of a country aspiring to gain credibility and influence on a global level, the issue of individual freedoms and the value of a self-critiquing public are prominent subjects of debate. These two topics are often in opposition to each other. National security is often easier to achieve at the expense of civil liberties and excess freedoms sometimes compromise national security. In an attempt to balance security and freedom, Erdoğan's policies and actions consistently favor security. As a result, the GoT has curtailed freedom of speech, social media, and news media. Recently enacted laws banned over 70,000 internet sites. Reaction to news coverage resulted in nationwide blackouts

on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The US Department of State found that the government's application of anti-terrorism laws promoted an environment of self-censorship in 2014.¹⁶

Somewhat conversely, Prime Minister Davutoğlu has espoused a three-tiered approach to achieving Turkey's aspirations of regional power and global importance. Within this approach he advocates prioritizing a strong democracy, dynamic economy, and active diplomacy that will ultimately restore Turkish national self-confidence and dignity. Davutoğlu believes these three pillars are important to remind the Turkish citizens that they "have existed throughout history, [and] will continue to exist," and that the Turkish culture "is not a secondary and passive culture; it is rather a nation which has shown its will to be an agent."¹⁷

Turkey's Government Trajectory:

The GoT is evolving. Joseph Nye, a political scientist who coined the phrase 'soft power', assessed that Turkey's reduction of its once thriving economy coupled with a similar reduction in democratic freedoms has left it with less 'soft power' than it had just a few years ago. During a recent interview with a leading Turkish newspaper, the Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor noted that the loss of freedom of the press and freedom of dissent are important factors in the change in Turkey's status. Additionally, Murat Yesiltas, in *Soft Balancing in Turkish Foreign Policy*, posits that Turkey adopted a soft balancing foreign policy towards the US since 2001, specifically with respect to the Iraq War and Turkey's desire to prevent the war and reduce any negative consequences on the Middle East and Turkey's interests. In other words, Turkey used non-military means to oppose the wishes of the more powerful US.

It is clear that President Erdoğan, Prime Minister Davutoğlu, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and former President Gul all desire an election victory on 7 June 2015 for their

party, the AKP. The difference manifests in the scale of the victory. Erdoğan hopes the AKP can win enough seats to ensure a minimum of 376 seats that are required to change the Turkish constitution to create a strong Presidential system. Many news outlets and political personalities highlight the proposed constitution and the Presidency as fundamental to the new Turkey and support the AKP's election manifesto.

Not all AKP members are comfortable with the proposed constitutional changes. Specifically, Gul and Arınç “expressed concerns about Erdoğan’s [plan] given the vague separation of powers and weak checks-and-balances.”¹⁸ Additionally, many recent newspaper articles echoed sentiments similar to this one: “AK Party had a charm. Masses chose AK Party because it was the symbol of stability. This charm is disappearing.”¹⁹ Part of this disappearing charm is related to the shift from a Parliamentary system to a Presidential one. The current transition period has hampered political dissonance and opposition. Faruk Kose, a Turkish political columnist, predicted that “the ruling Justice and Development Party, AKP, will be trying to install the Mexican type of presidential system in place of the current regime.”²⁰ As these dissonant messages indicate, not all political figures in Turkey have the same goals and the resulting dichotomy of action, both with and against US interests, places Turkey in a precarious international relations position.

Repression of dissenting or oppositional voices is a disturbing aspect of Turkey’s trajectory. Turkish armed forces have been a political factor in Turkey’s past, and the AKP used the Army’s history of human rights abuses and coups to actively marginalize them over the past decade. The ‘Balyoz’ (sledgehammer) case is one example in which the GoT arrested, prosecuted, and jailed hundreds of staff officers, effectively eliminating an entire generation of well-educated future military leaders. Sedat Ergin, a journalist who has written more than 70

articles about the case from 2010 -2015, characterized the case as a political trial designed to weaken the Turkish Army during a recent interview.

As previously mentioned, the GoT is transforming by adopting legislation that it designed to restrict dissention and centralize political power. The GoT has expanded the nation's intelligence agency and the police while passing legislation to strengthen its hold on the judiciary. Recently, Parliament passed legislation that provided a classified budget with minimal oversight for use by President Erdogan to use for "intelligence, defense, political and other purposes."²¹

Another example of the gradual shift in Turkey is playing out within the police force and judiciary. As a result of accusations of corruption against Erdoğan by Gülen in December 2013, Erdoğan retaliated by purging a large part of the police department, resulting in the retirement of a department head, a provincial police chief, and a deputy chief of police that the AKP claims had ties to Gülen. Additionally, the AKP reassigned prosecutors in the case and increased control and oversight of the judiciary. The case against Erdoğan was subsequently dropped. Following a controversial domestic security bill signed into law in April, 2015, a review by the Supreme Assessing Authority, 1,150 of 1,725 first degree police chiefs have been retired. Another 3,500 constables and 2,400 second-, third-, and fourth-degree police chiefs are expected to be retired in May as a result. This requires large personnel turnover and new promotions in which the composition of the police force will change. The majority of the retired police chiefs have the common trait of being accused by AKP of having ties to the 'parallel state' that they claim is led by Gülen.

In addition to government officials, many others are targets of free speech curtailment. "Scores of people have been prosecuted for insulting Mr Erdoğan since he moved from the prime

minister's to the president's office last August — including cartoonists, journalists [and] students.”²² More evidence of censorship of opposing opinions is contained in the 2015 Human Rights Report on Turkey written by the US Department of State. It found politicization of the judiciary and law enforcement that resulted in the reassignment of thousands of police officers and judicial prosecutors in retaliation for a case against the GoT. Those who initiated the case were suspended and the AKP destroyed all evidence previously gathered and closed the investigation.²³ In a separate incident, the report also noted that longer prison sentences were sought for those who used social media to send updates regarding Turkish protests. Further marginalizing the judiciary, recently passed regulations empower the GoT to block internet sites without a court order. In response to news coverage of a hostage situation in March 2105 in which terrorists killed a prosecutor, Prime Minister Davutoğlu ordered a temporary suspension of reporting and blocked accreditation for 13 different media outlets. The US condemned the threat to free speech when Davutoğlu followed the block by ordering a terror investigation against seven newspapers.

Turkey's current trajectory toward repression and consolidation of power in a presidential system and the loss of transparency and justice that accompanies it will strain the US-Turkish relationship in the near future. In order to achieve its goals in a manner compatible with maintaining its friendly partnership with the US as well as regional interests, Turkey must take certain steps.

What Must Turkey Do?

As the global power balance continues its ever-constant fluctuations, the GoT realizes that it must anticipate dynamic conditions and act to shape the future it desires in order to continue its recent ascendancy. Turkey must re-engage with EU reforms and financial

discipline. The AKP guided Turkey to fiscal prosperity and social advancement largely by doing just that and it should return to those practices as its economic growth begins to flatten. From 2002 to 2011, Erdoğan's party achieved growth rates between six and nine percent and directed projects that resulted in improved education and health care for the majority of Turkish citizens. The average citizen, not just the powerful elite, benefitted from these pursuits and rewarded Erdoğan with continued re-election. The 2008 global financial crisis slowed the growth rate and was coincident with Turkey's shift away from reform and previously successful financial programs.

Turkey should return to and continue its "decades-long modernization process...where rulers take their legitimacy from the consent of the people and representative secular democracy co-exists with free-market economic oriented economies and traditional Islamic values."²⁴ Turkey must strive for an inclusive government with transparent checks and balances to legitimize political power. Whether they decide to continue the shift toward a presidential system or maintain a parliamentary system, Turkey should decide rapidly and move forward. The energy spent on the transformation to a controversial presidential system and the exclusion of opposition parties within parliament are detrimental to Turkey's progress. Above all, separation of powers must be maintained to prevent a loss of domestic and international faith in the government of Turkey.

The Kurdish issue must be resolved. This has stolen vast amounts of energy, time and resources from politicians over the past few decades. The peace process that was moving forward has been sidelined for political gain and must be placed back on track.

Turkey and the EU must reengage in negotiations. Even though full EU membership is not the missing piece of Turkey's ascendancy, the influence of EU standards and practices has enhanced Turkey's progression. Both the UE and Turkey benefit from this relationship.

Turkey must abandon conspiracy theories. The Turkish government has successfully rallied the Turkish people behind its causes and been able to blame its setbacks upon to primary and unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. The first is an external threat of the 'superior mind,' a conspiratorial theory in which the US, EU, NATO, or Israel somehow undermines Turkey's progress. The second is an internal threat of the 'parallel structure' in which opposition such as the military, former party supporters, or terrorists seek to control and derail Turkish achievement from within. The local newspapers provide examples of such beliefs. Retired Turkish General Bilgin Balanli, who was among 236 suspects recently acquitted in a high profile coup-plot case, intimated to local reporters that the CIA might have been involved.

While the external focus has served the GoT well by creating domestic support via an us-against-the-world mentality and providing a voiceless entity upon which to assign blame for governmental shortcomings, these unprovable assertions begin to appear as irrational paranoia when examined closely. Close examination is more likely as the tangible economic benefits become increasingly scarce to the voting public. Since Erdoğan is the driving force behind the personality of the GoT, it is not surprising that the insecurity that manifests in paranoia present in the GoT at large is also evident in Erdoğan. The 2015 edition of the annual Human Rights Report produced by the US Department of State noted that "then prime minister Erdoğan appeared as a plaintiff in 503 complaint files in the Ankara Public Prosecution Office [and] most of the files were for social media messages deemed "insulting or threatening" to the then prime minister."²⁵ In order to earn treatment as a major global player, Turkey and its leaders must put

aside insecurities and demonstrate that they do not need to use the judicial system to punish those with dissenting voices.

Another recommendation to assist Turkey in achieving greater economic and diplomatic strength in addition to elevating their international status is to normalize relations with Armenia. Both countries have legitimate reasons for maintaining their defiant positions with respect to each other, but both also would benefit from the economic and cultural exchange that an open border would bring. Additionally, the apparent stubbornness that it displays in this issue undermines Turkey's aspiration to be a regional influence and to earn respect as a stabilizing and guiding nation.

Instability driven by political transformation, unresolved Kurdish issues, and a regression of public freedoms that accompanies a cessation of modernization efforts are significant factors in Turkey's continued growth and empowerment in the region and on the global stage. This instability will be most tangibly felt in the economy as the investors who have contributed to Turkey's recent growth will find other places to invest their capital. As the AKP has found over the past decade, a strong economy can compensate for and dampen opposition to otherwise unpopular policies and practices. The US desires a free, secular, and democratic Turkey. A resumption of EU reforms and financial discipline will place Turkey back on the path to sustained mutual benefit and cooperation with the US.

Summary:

Turkey has played a significant role in global history as part of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey currently plays an important international role and is a rising regional power. As a secular, stable, democratic republic with a majority Muslim population and ties to both the East and the West, Turkey is a valuable international partner of the US. Turkish President Erdogan

has parleyed domestic economic success into more than a decade of popularity and support. This enables him to drive a shift from a secular, democratic republic to an authoritarian regime with limited freedoms. The primary political forces within the GoT have curtailed dissenting voices from news outlets and social media. New legislation enables tighter control over and reduces opposition from the judiciary and law enforcement.

The US should assist Turkey to maintain its moderate posture. In order to do so, Turkey must re-engage EU-based reforms to retard the trend of diminishing human rights and civil liberties. Turkey must demonstrate that it is ready to fulfil the responsibilities that accompany being an international power. Mending external relationships with Armenia and internal relationships with the Kurds and abandoning any conspiratorial mentality will show political maturity and create substantial economic benefit. Ultimately, the legitimacy of governance that is derived a balanced government that operates with transparency will increase the stability of Turkey and strengthen its relationship with the US.

1 Ahmet Davutoglu, "The Restoration of Turkey: Strong Democracy, Dynamic Economy, and Active Diplomacy" *Center for Strategic Research*, No. 7 (August 2014): 15.

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